

Paul Carter CBE Leader of the Council

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Dear *Tom,*

Thank you for your letter dated 25 February regarding the highway improvement scheme outside Tonbridge Station. I am also pleased with the positive responses we are getting.

With regards to the congestion at certain times heading north from the Pembury roundabout, we have not yet carried out post-works monitoring to determine the effects the junction has made, as there are additional improvements that we are due to make in the meantime. We will carry this out as part of normal scheme monitoring and in line with our obligations with regards to the Local Enterprise Partnership funding. It should be noted that during the works there were reduced traffic movements from Waterloo Road which actually aided traffic flow to some extent and perhaps raised expectations, only to be lowered when the new traffic lights were implemented. However, we shall look to compare data from before and make changes as necessary to allow all users of the junction to travel as efficiently as possible.

As you mentioned, the High Street is planned to be altered this summer which should help reduce queues along the Railway Approach heading north. Now that Waterloo Road is less prominent as a shortcut since the new lights have been installed, drivers are more likely to stay on the Quarry Hill Road instead of cutting behind Lidl, which I am sure is of relief to the residents of Waterloo Road.

The scheme is designed to better balance the needs of all users of the area. At peak times congestion is possible whilst the new traffic light system allows large numbers of pedestrians, mainly school children, to cross the roads safely, without having to navigate their way past moving vehicles. Although this is of great benefit it inevitably slows the vehicle movements while this happens. Our assessment is that this is worst during the peak times but, as to be expected, the traffic is fairly free flowing at other times of the day.

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With regards to the timings of the traffic lights it is standard practice for them to bed down before making any timing changes. However, our officers have identified some improvements, particularly over the weekends, that can be made, and these have been loaded into the system and are awaiting a site visit during the week commencing 4 March to become live. The officers will continue to monitor the timings and will adjust where they can.

The issue you mention of the delay between cars being stopped and pedestrians being given a green light is something that has been raised. However, this is actually to do with the sensors on the junction giving extra time for vehicles and pedestrians to clear the junction safely. If a vehicle enters the junction without having a clear exit the sensors will pick this up and give extra time for the vehicle to clear safely before allowing pedestrians to cross. To counteract this, we are installing yellow box markings to deter drivers from entering the junction if they do not have a clear exit.

The same is true of pedestrians crossing. If a pedestrian joins the crossing late because they have run across at the end of the pedestrian cycle for instance, the sensors will pick them up and allow extra time for them to exit the crossing for their safety. This can slow the whole junction down. To counteract this, we shall be installing additional push button display units and an additional post, when crossing from south of Waterloo Road, to more clearly indicate when it is safe for pedestrians to cross. The system is designed to monitor who is using the junction and alter the timings dynamically to maximise safety and efficiency. The benefit is if someone presses the button requesting to cross the road and then changes their mind, the cameras will pick this up and cancel their request, keeping traffic flowing.

Puffin crossings are becoming the norm throughout the country as they are dynamic and can respond to users' needs in real time as opposed to pelican crossings which allocate a set time to cross the road when requested. As this is a puffin crossing, we can only use near sided display units. This is because when a pedestrian presses the button, they are given a 'green man' on their near side unit and it will fairly quickly turn to red. We would then want that pedestrian to cross the road. If somebody else comes up behind them late we would want them to see a 'red man' and stop until the next cycle. By placing a far sided display this would turn red very quickly and the first pedestrian would then reach half way across the road only to see a 'red man' appear and may legitimately panic. Subsequently if the far sided unit stayed green this would encourage the second pedestrian to cross, when they shouldn't, which in turn would lengthen the time of the 'green man' and slow traffic movements.

The additional push button displays placed higher up the poles should help with visibility but of course we shall monitor this going forward. We are considering if educational material would provide benefit here as there is clearly some confusion about how puffin crossings operate.

We would agree that the scheme has provided many great benefits for the area surrounding the busiest train station in Kent and has particularly provided benefit to bus users, train users and the hundreds of school children using the area daily during term time. However, we would agree there are always tweaks and improvements that can be considered to ensure the scheme is optimised.